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Election Guide Asks Critical Questions

Vancouver—Many mayors and municipal councilors say that 80% of the decisions they make are about how we make use of our land. Those decisions affect our health, our air and water quality, our commute— and our taxes, but many voters don't realize how important these decisions are.

Helping voters ask probing questions of their candidates is the "Pocket Guide to Election Issues," an accessible 12-page booklet published by Smart Growth BC, which is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that works to create compact, more livable communities. *"The pocket guide can help voters understand the land use responsibilities of our elected officials,"* says Cheeying Ho, Smart Growth BC's Executive Director. *"It makes it easier for busy voters to quickly pinpoint how we can make smart choices for the future of our communities."*

The Guide provides a short background on top growth issues, and suggests questions that voters can ask candidates about access to parks, schools, work and shopping; farmland preservation; transportation; climate protection; and others. For example, page 3 reminds us that the way we build our neighbourhoods and communities can dramatically affect our Body Mass Index and health. Here, the Guide suggests the following question: *"How will you ensure that all new development occurs in existing developed areas, thereby increasing walkability and proximity to shops and services?"*

What's more, the state of our roads, bridges, water supply, sewer and stormwater lines directly affects our daily lives, and their cost affects our taxes. While the costs of building these critical underpinnings are partly paid by developers, taxpayers bear the brunt of maintenance for years. Land use policies that encourage more compact communities save taxpayers money by using existing infrastructure more efficiently and avoid duplication of facilities in far-flung locations.

Tens of thousands of guides will be distributed through neighbourhood networks, local newspapers and community centres in towns and cities throughout BC. Community groups across the province, including the BC Sustainable Energy Association, are using this resource to craft questions for candidates' surveys and all-candidates' forums. The Guide will also be available for free download at: www.smartgrowth.bc.ca, where community groups can order free copies. Those readers who fill-out a short online survey to evaluate the Guide will be entered into a draw to win a luxury vacation in Whistler.

Smart Growth BC is the leading non-governmental organization working towards creating more livable communities in British Columbia.

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